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Marcus Whitman, M.D.

By V. F. P.

By permission of President Penrose,
Whitman College, Walla Walla, Washington.

EARLY in this century an American Fur Company trapper spent a night in the far northwest across the Rocky Mountains with a tribe of Nez Perces Indians. At bedtime they saw him take from an inner pocket a little book, his eyes traversing its pages as he slowly turned them. A book was all unknown to them. He closed his eyes and his lips moved. They thought his prayer an incantation. They asked what these things meant. He told them how the Book showed the way to the better land, and that in the East men knew the white man's God to whom he had been praying. The wonderful news spread fast from campfire to campfire.

An embassy of their most honored men was sent across

the mountains to bring back knowledge of the book of heaven. In 1832 four Indian chiefs reached St. Louis. Gen. Clark, commander of the posts, was a Roman Catholic. He showed them all honors, feted them, showed them all the sights. But they did not get the book. The two old chiefs died in St. Louis, and the night before the young men left, one of them expressed his sorrow.

"I came to you with one eye partly open for more light to my people, who sit in darkness. I will go back with both eyes closed. How can I go back blind to my blind people?"

A young man in Gen. Clark's office heard the farewell and wrote it to his family in Pittsburg. The message was printed, thrilling many hearts. Dr. Samuel Parker offered himself to the American Board to go from Massa-

chusetts to Oregon. The Presbyterian Church of Ithaca, N. Y., decided to pay the expenses. Delayed by adverse circumstances a year and a half, Mr. Parker the last few months lectured on missions in Western New York. There he was heard by a young man, Dr. Marcus Whitman, elder in the Presbyterian Church at Wheeler, who offered himself for the work.

Marcus Whitman was born in 1802 at Rushville, N.Y., and his early home had made him familiar with all the privations of pioneer life. He had received the best possible religious training. He had hoped to be a minister, but on account of ailments, turned to medicine. He had four years been a doctor, had spent some years in business as part owner of a saw-mill with his brother. This experience proved most valuable.

The Methodists sent the Lees to Oregon in 1834, and the American Board wanted to send men with them, but failed to secure them. In 1835 they despatched Mr. Parker and Dr. Whitman, who reached Green River in Wyoming, the terminus of the American Company's route. There they met traders, trappers, and a multitude of Indians from all parts of the vast wildernass. With the knowledge gained from their long journey and their intercourse here with the red men, they began to understand better how great was the work before them. They needed more he'pers. It was decided that Mr. Parker should proceed to select locations for three Missions, while Dr. Whitman returned East with the Company's party to secure more men. Two Indian boys accompanied him. Cholera attacked the company, and Dr. Whitman's

skill put all under great obligations. He reached Rushville in November.

The Doctor had long beeu engaged to Miss Narcissa Prentice of Prattsburg, as enthusiastic about this work as he. They were married in March, 1836, and one month later started on their long wedding trip with Rev. H. H. Spaulding and his bride, Mr. Gray, two teamsters, and the two Indian boys.

They had to have passports as if going to a foreign country, signed by the Secretary of War, commending them to "the friendly attentions of Civil and Military Agents and Officers, and of Citizens, and if at any time it shall be necessary, to their protection." West of the Mississippi there were but three States, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri; there was no railroad west of the Alle-

ghenies; till eight years later there was no telegraph anywhere.

For years the Hudson Bay Company had ruled over three hundred thousand square miles—Oregon—with their forts and trading-posts driving out eleven other fur companies. They wished to keep the country in its wild state for the sake of their furs, and all immigration from the East was discouraged.

The journey by canal from Hollidaysburg, Pa. to the Ohio, down the Ohio, up the Mississippi and Missouri to Council Bluffs was tedious, but all the party, their wagons, stock and outfit were safely landed. The American Fur Company was sending out a convoy of two hundred men and six hundred animals to their post in Oregon, and had promised to start at a certain date from there. But they

were gone when Dr. Whitman reached the place, and dangerous, forced marches through the Indian country had to be made till, late in May, they overtook the convoy at Loup Fork. The bravery of Mrs. Whitman and Mrs. Spaulding was so great that one of their rough caravan companions said: "There is something that the Honorable Hudson Bay Company cannot expel from the country."

The Indian boys proved of great service. Each morning "horses were fed and breakfast eaten and the start made by six, at eleven encamp, rest and feed, and start again at two and travel till six, and if we come to a good tavern, camp for the night."

"Dried buffalo meat and tea for breakfast, and tea and dried buffalo meat for supper," was soon the bill of

fare. Fording rivers of varying danger ceased to alarm. A novel ferry in one place was a dried elk-skin with two ropes attached. A person would lie flat on the skin "and two Indian women swimming, holding the ropes in their mouths, pull it across the stream."

On the Fourth of July, 1836, they reached the summit of the Rocky Mountains, South Pass (seven years before Fremont), and unfurling a United States flag, opened their Bible, and kneeling, took possession of the whole Pacific Coast "in the name of God and of the United States."

Dr. Whitman persisted in dragging along their canvas-covered wagon. The Hudson Bay Company tried vainly to stop it, as they had every other up to this time, but Whitman persisted. Seven times in one morning it rolled

down the sides of the canyon; it broke; he made it a two-wheeled cart and carried the other wheels. *But he got it over the mountains.*

At Green River the Cayuse and Nez Perces who expected Dr. Whitman and his party were delighted to meet them, rejoicing especially in the "noble white squaws who had come over the long trail." The six months' journey ended at Fort Walla Walla (Beautiful Valley) now Wallula, Sept 1st, thirty-five hundred miles, for more than eleven hundred of which they had seen but one house.

At Waiilatpui, four miles from the present town of Walla Walla, the Hudson Bay Company stationed them, having sent the Methodists to the Willamette. The Whitman party had to travel three hundred miles further to Vancouver first, to confer with the Company about their location.

Dr. Whitman built their house with his own hands "of adobe, mud dried in the form of brick, only larger." Windows and doors were of the roughest material put together by "one who knows nothing about the work," wrote Mrs. Eells, who joined the Mission in 1838. "The bedsteads are boards nailed to the side of the house, sink fashion; then some blankets and husks make the bed; but it is good compared to traveling accommodations."

In three years two hundred and fifty acres of land were enclosed, mostly cultivated, a grist mill constructed, an orchard planted, and the third building being erected. Mrs. Whitman had a school of fifty or more children, and superinteuded the house and Mission, while the Doctor superintended the farm and mill, taught, preached, and had a large medical practice covering many square miles.

The Indians were wild and superstitious, yet a large number had been persuaded to farm the land.

The water supply came from the swift Walla Walla River, and this caused a great sorrow. One day their only child, two and a half years old, was drowned in it. Two little tin cups on the bank told the tale. Her body was recovered. She could speak the Nez Perces language plainly and sing their songs, and "the little white Cayuse" was dearly loved. Her death seemed to estrange the Indians. The Jesuits had been using their influence against the Mission also.

In the fall of 1842 a band of one hundred and twenty American settlers reached Waiilatpui, Gen. Lovejoy among them. Dr. Whitman then learned that a treaty was pending to cede for the Newfoundland fisheries

Oregon—a territory equal to all of New England, all of the Middle States, and three Connecticuts. Well had the Hudson Bay Company done their work of circulating false reports, which were industriously printed in English papers, then sent to the United States. All that marvelous region was accordingly despised by our ignorant Government.

Dr. Whitman was summoned to the Hudson Bay Company posts at Fort Walla Walla to see a sick man at this juncture, twenty-five miles away. While at dinner with the traders, a guide rushed in with exciting news. A party of British settlers were about to enter Oregon from the north and seize it for England. A young Catholic priest "leaped to his feet in triumph and proposed the toast: 'Here's to Oregon; she is ours now. The United

States may whistle for her.' " Dr. Whitman kept quiet. As soon as possible he rose and hastily rode home, calling out to Mr. Spaulding, who stood in the doorway there "I must go to Washington this winter." He seemed a mad man. The Mission party were quickly summoned and all the important facts laid before them. After long discussion—certain death it seemed to cross the Rockies in winter; religion and politics should not be mixed; the American Board had not been cousulted—leave of absence was granted. Absolute secrecy was enjoined. The next morning he was off, Oct. 3, 1842.

"He took with him a young white man, Lovejoy, and an Indian who professed to act as guide." In ten days they had covered 330 miles to Fort Hall, where the English Captain Grant, the opposer of wagons, stopped them.

He was suspicious of such a trip East when the snow was already on the mountains. He also said the Indians were on the war-path. With indomitable courage and patriotism, Whitman then turned a thousand miles out of his way, to Santa Fe, over a territory unknown to them all. The guide turned back. Whitman retraced his steps and got another with loss of a week's time. Over icy rivers, through blinding snows, on he rode with Lovejoy. When they reached Bent's Fort in Arkansas, Jan. 3, 1843, Whitman's face, hands and feet were frozen, in spite of his fur clothing. Dog meat and mule meat had been their fare. Here Lovejoy and the Indian, utterly exhausted, had to rest, but Whitman pushed on. Handbills telling of Oregon's resources were scattered broadcast, some even reaching Texas. The trains of immigrants now met re-

ceived glowing accounts of Oregon. At last St. Louis was reached. Here helearned the treaty had been signed before he even started, but the Oregon question was still open.

The third of March Whitman reached Washington. For five months he had been traveling those four thousand miles, three thousand of it on horseback. Daniel Webster refused to heed him. President Tyler saw his frozen hands and face, listened, made the usual objections from the usual English authorities, said no wagon could cross the Rocky Mountains. "Why, Mr. President, seven years ago I took the first wagon that ever crossed the Rocky Mountains; it is out at Waiilatpui now," said Whitman. "Well," replied President Tyler, "if you can show the accessibility of Oregon, and that the mountains can be crossed by wagons, I will see that the land isn't given

to Great Britain."

With but a week's delay Whitman turned westward, leading the first wagon train that ever crossed the American continent, two hundred wagons, one thousand loyal Americans. Past the protesting Captain Grant he led them all, through difficulties unimaginable now in our five days' trip across in steam cars. Nearly a year after his farewell to his wife, she looked up and saw that long line come winding down the mountains. She had had no previous news. Letters were sent by uncertain carriers by way of Vancouver to the Sandwich Islands, round Cape Horn to the United States. The first home letters had taken two years and a half to reach her.

When in 1846 the treaty fixing 49° as our northern boundary to the Pacific was signed, then also was signed

Dr. Whitman's death warrant. British vengeance was roused. The Jesuits instigated the Indians to revolt. With the white settlers measles had come, which proved fatal to the Indians, who took sweat baths, then plunged into the icy river. They were told it was Dr. Whitman's medicine that caused so many deaths.

On the 29th of November, 1847, he was indoors, giving medicine to a sick Indian boy. An Indian stole through the door in moccasined feet, bearing in his hand, under his blanket, a hatchet. One blow on the back of the Doctor's head, his blood gushed out and he fell with a groan. The warwhoop rang out. Guns were fired. Mrs. Whitman was killed by a bullet. Fourteen were massacred, the rest, except a very few, carried into captivity worse than death. Not one trace of civilization was left.

Later, all the remains were gathered and buried in one huge mound. Till 1858 the land lay desolate. Then it was reopened for settlement. Cushing Eells, his friend and co-laborer, returned, and by that lonely grave vowed to raise a fitting monument to the national hero, the apostle and martyr.

By almost superhuman self-denials he and his wife put money aside little by little, till in 1866 the Whitman Academy was started at Walla Walla, four miles from the grave. In 1883 it was made a college, and to-day three buildings with one hundred and fifty students are the only monument to the only man to whom we owe three stars in our American flag. For out of Oregon came Washington, Idaho, and Oregon States.

Struggling little college! Surely the American people could well afford to make it worthier such a hero. So long forgotten, almost unknown to American patriots. Cannot *you* help it, with prayer, with money? Will you not?

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